

21 November 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT:

Reconnaissance in North
Vietnam and South China

1. This memorandum is responding to the minute of
The Special Group of 15 November 1961, paragraph 7.

2. What Indication is There from Collateral Sources
of Increased Buildup by the Communists in North Vietnam and
Communist China Immediately North of the Border?

There are some reports, unconfirmed, which suggest buildup in Yunnan Province opposite the Laos and North Vietnam borders such as: augmentation of air strength in South China since last August; activation of new airfields in the Nanning area; possible flight of ChiCom jet fighters over North Vietnam and Laos; training of Pathet Lao forces at Yunnan bases.

3. What Will the Recent Satellite Photography
Obtained Over South China and North Vietnam Tell Us about Buildup?

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Referral review by
NIMA completed.

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Very little, if anything. The preliminary readout of Mission [redacted] on the prime target area, USSR, has just been finished. NPIC is now examining the photography, a single pass, over Communist China and North Vietnam. A hasty look at a few frames in North Vietnam shows that the quality is good, there are some clouds, but that it is almost certain we will be unable to assess critical changes

[redacted] except where there have been major buildings constructed (which will not be identifiable in terms of function) 25X1 or major installations involving the scaring of the earth.

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4. As quickly as NPIC can readout the [redacted] frames over this area, the information will be reported to you. However, it is not anticipated that we will gain critical information bearing on the question of ChiCom buildup.

5. NPIC is producing selected graphic materials in the North Vietnam and South China area [redacted] which will give the layman an indication of the quality as it relates to the use of satellite photography to solve our intelligence problems in South China and North Vietnam in connection with the current Indochina crisis. These samples will be sent to your office by noon, 22 November 1961.

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6. Conclusions:

a. Collateral information, as well as recent [redacted] materials, do not permit a firm judgment that there is significant increased buildup in North Vietnam and South China.

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b. There is no basis for the hope that satellite photography of the present quality will provide the information to permit a dependable judgment on the question of buildup, let alone the information required for contingency planning.

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James O. Reber
Chairman
Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance

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8- dea

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